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**Felipe Bernardo Furtado Soares** is lawyer, Master in Law. He is member of research group Indisciplinar, of Architecture and Urbanism School, at Federal University of Minas Gerais. He studies biopolitical urbanism, constitutional rights, philosophy of law, juridical sociology and juridical anthropology.

**Marília Pimenta Chaves** is student of Architecture and Urbanism course. She is member of research group Indisciplinar, of Architecture and Urbanism School, at Federal University of Minas Gerais. She studies architecture and urban planning project.

**Bernardo Neves** is architect and urban planner. He is member of research group Indisciplinar, of Architecture and Urbanism School, at Federal University of Minas Gerais. He studies architecture and urban planning project

**Natacha Rena** is architect and urban planner, Doctor in Communication and Semiotics. She is Professor of Architecture course, of Architecture and Urbanism School, at Federal University of Minas Gerais and coordinator of research group Indisciplinar. She studies cartography of territorial conflicts and biopolitical urbanism.

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### Abstract

The word that sustained the project within the Station Square's Cultural Corridor, suggested for Belo Horizonte's central zone in 2013, is that the central region is degraded and it needs to be restored to gain a new life, attracting new residents, visitors and investments as a consequence. The increase of empty spaces over the years and the abandonment are fundamental when justifying new investments, while hiding the gentrification process, a logic of urbanization reported countless times by Neil Smith (1979; 2006), a Geography scholar. In Belo Horizonte's case, there's an unfolding dispute between neoliberal urbanism and the network of militants and activists. On one hand, some investors took advantage of the devaluation in real estate prices and purchased various properties - which after the revitalization - will increase their value. On the other hand, the network of activist movements was able to change the course of the "Station Square's Cultural Corridor" project, claiming that

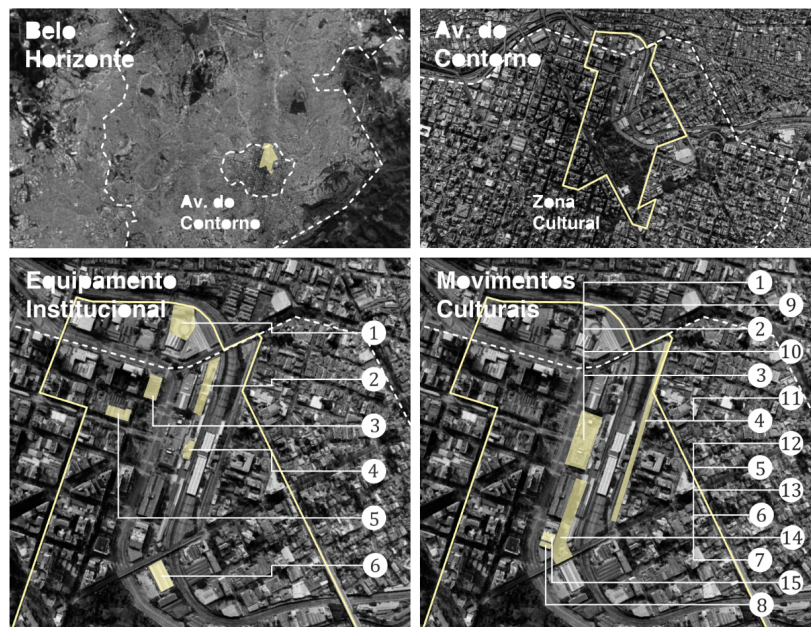
there was already life and culture in that region, launching a campaign called "O corredor cultura já existe!" (The cultural corridor already exists!). The Indisciplinary research group takes active part in cataloging the territorial struggles between major urban projects, proposed by the State, and the city's network of resistance. Acting as another node in this network to identify the complex blind-spots where neoliberal urbanism is involved, considering its different scales. In recent years, the group's researchers are acting within different fronts; contributing both on producing basic and translated information to feed the social movements involved in the network, as well as acting institutionally, for example, composing the Cultural Zone Council, created to produce a master plan with guidelines for the central area.

**Keywords:** Gentrification; Major urban projects; Resistance networks; Belo Horizonte

## Introduction

"Improving without expelling", that is the ethical principle underlining the Station Square Cultural Zone's Committee, a collegiate body consisting of ten members, where half are nominated by Belo Horizonte's City Hall, and the other half are elected by the civil society. This ethical principle adopts ideas that led some participating social movements in the network of resistance, which prompted the committee's creation in 2014, after many demands and actions taken against the Cultural Corridor of Station Square project, proposed by the City Hall in early 2013.

In order to understand how this ethical principle was built, it is necessary to comprehend the present territory of the so-called Station Square Cultural Zone, which has been created by often-conflicting interests. The area has the following perimeter and receives the following equipment and cultural manifestations:



**Fig. 1:** Cultural Zone<sup>1</sup>. Institutional Equipment: 1. Funarte/IPHAN, 2. Youth Reference Centre, 3. CentoeQuatro, 4. UFMG's Cultural Centre, 5. Souza Pinto Sawmill. Cultural Movements: 1. Praia da Estação (Station's Beach), 2. Fora Lacerda (Get Out Lacerda), 3. Vá de Branco (Go wearing white), 4. Cidade Eletronika (Elektronik City), 5. Samba da Meia Noite (Midnight Samba), 6. Duelo de MC's (Duel of MC's), 7. Família de Rua (Street Family), 8. Nelson Bordello, 9. Marcha das Vadias (Slut walk), 10. Parada Gay (LGBTQ+ Pride Parade), 11. Paisagens Poéticas (Poetic Landscapes), 12. Baixo, 13. Sarau Vira Lata (Pooch Party), 14. Real da Rua (Real from the street), 15. Teatro Espanca! (Theater). Source: Produced by André Victor.

The imagery of the Cultural Corridor had haunted the region since 1980, which shows that - in many cases - major urban projects are preceded by seemingly unrelated projects and work. Nevertheless, that indicates the existence of a long-term plan by a public and private agents.

Many urban studies from the last fifteen years have linked the city's gentrification process to the numberless urban interventions, renovations, and regenerations through the 80's and 90's, often favored or even stimulated by the municipal government (Hackworth cited in Mendes, 2008).

In this paper, the intent is to summarize the Zona Cultural's history [Cultural Zone], from the conflicts between gentrification strategies, adopted by the State, to the tactics and strategies of the anti-gentrification movement - employed by the network of social movements in the site. These conflicts are crisscrossed by flows of global and local interests, making the territory an elaborate plot formed by different perspectives, about what the city is and what it should be.

In this context, the culture will be useful to understand both the gentrification process and the tactics used by social movements. Rena, et al. (2015) have already observed the use of the cultural agenda in order to implement major urban projects:

Because they represent crucial poles in this project, so-called "cultural" processes are more and more valued within the urban market. In these projects, guided by peacemaking measures of urban transformation in a "hygienic and consensual scenario",

promoting global tourism as a priority - addressing the needs of the local communities. Thus, it is seen yet another movement of cognitive capture by the neoliberal system, which expropriates and transforms the cultural logic into yet another means to increase the value of urban sites. These transformations occur mainly within the central zone of the city, and as a consequence expels the low-income population - and then installing new apparatus related to this new cultural industry (Rena, et al., 2015).

The project "Cultural Corridor of Station Square" is in a context of neoliberal urbanism in Belo Horizonte, and is part of the core of a wider urban project, named Operação Urbana Consorciada Antônio Carlos Via Leste-Oeste (OUC-ACLO) (Once named OUC Nova Belo Horizonte). However, the resistance networks have also used the culture as a counter movement to this project.

### **From the heritage as resistance to the proposal of the Cultural Corridor of Station Square**

From the mid-20th century to late 1980, the area around Station Square did not have a central role in the city's economic dynamics. Although in the first half of the 20th century the Central Train Station was crucial to the dynamics of Minas Gerais' capital - due to the railways' role in transporting people and goods - the site lost its interest given the increasing importance of road transportation - boosted during Kubitschek's government. The industrial activities once gathered there were relocated to other parts of the city, emptying its buildings. From the 60's on, the area suffered some infrastructural changes to meet the needs of the road system: widening of roads, gardens, and squares were diminished and trees, cut off (Giffoni, 2010). By the end of the 70's, facing the possibility of demolishing the square's architectural complex in order to build a bus station and subway connections, groups concerned with heritage protection - along with the Brazilian Architects Institute (IAB-MG) - started a campaign for the protection and renovation of this historically significant urban zone (Arroyo, 2012).

In 1988, the Station Square Architectural Complex was declared a historical landmark by the State's Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage (IEPHA/MG). From then on, different urban equipment received public and private investments in order to become cultural venues, in agreement with the international trend of revitalizing historical centers (Trevisan, 2012).

In 1993, the Reference Center to the Homeless Population (CREAS POP) / Miguilim Project was built on a site adjacent to the square. This marked a contrast with the already existing buildings, to serve a marginalized portion of the population, which received few resources along history.

In 1995, the City Hall launched a competition for downtown's revitalization. The winner project, by authorship of B&L Architecture Office, indicated a series of spatial transformations directed towards culture - among which the construction of a wide terrace designed to host cultural and leisure activities was planned. The revitalization would happen through the partnership between private sectors for the Arrudas' Riverside border covering (Berquó, 2015). Between 1997 and 1998, the restoration of Souza Pinto Sawmill took place - which was abandoned since the early 80's. The goal was to prepare the space to host fairs, shows, and events. In 1999, Santa Tereza Viaduct underwent a cultural renovation, in which Largo dos Poetas was built near Bahia Street. On the other side, a stage, a grandstand, a dance floor and a bar/café were built. The proposal that had the Venice percept Letter as a basis was to recover from its degradation - represented by homeless population, cars and also the physical degradation of the viaduct itself - through equipment that would encourage cultural use.

In the year 2000, the IAB-MG draw attention again to the necessity of promoting the region's appropriation by different social classes, which are not the established one (low-income population), with initiatives oriented to the diversification of use regarding the surrounding buildings (Miranda, 2007). In this way, IAB-MG promoted an edition of the event Casa Cor at Casa do Conde - currently Funarte headquarters - presenting to the City Hall a project to create the Cultural Corridor of Station Square, recovering the idea previously launched in 1981. In the same year, the Flávio Gutierrez Institute disclosed the implementation of Arts & Crafts Museum at the Central Station's building and in the East Minas Station, in which the ownership was handed over by the public power to the private sector, using the Operação Urbana Consorciada (OUC).

Trevisan (2012) explains the existent synergy between the private investments and projects by the public power in this region:

The proposal to adapt the Central Railway Station's building, to accommodate the Arts & Crafts Museum, was widely debated at that time along with the City Hall of Belo Horizonte. So the museum's implementation and the urban revitalization projects were compatible. The building's restoration, the Station Square's recuperation and the proposal of intervention at Aarão Reis Street happened almost simultaneously (Trevisan, 2012, s.p.).

In 2005, the Cultural Corridor was institutionally established with the inauguration of the Arts & Crafts Museum and Funarte. It would all be directed by the heiress of Andrade Gutierrez Contractor Company, that later would indicate their interest, along with Odebrecht and Barbosa Melo contractor companies, to develop the OUC within the central zone - considering the Cultural Corridor as a significant focus of market interest (to be discussed later on). In the same year, inferring that the project "Cultural Corridor of Station Square" was already being planned for many years, the construction of Arrudas Boulevard started. It consisted on the canalization and covering of Arrudas River, to meet the demands of the Green Line's project - aiming to facilitate the access to the north zone of the city, where are located the Confins' Airport, the Administrative City and other large urban projects, like Izidora's region.

In a broad perspective of Belo Horizonte's territory, it is remarkable that all of these projects were preparing the site for the already mentioned Operação Urbana Consorciada Antônio Carlos Via Leste-Oeste (OUC-ACLO), previously known as "Nova BH" [New Belo Horizonte]. The city central area, where the Station Square is located, is a fundamental point of the huge urbanistic project which aims the reestablishment of 7% of the county's territory. Creating more space to the expansion of the real estate market, this had been announced in 2012 by the City Hall's Secretary of Belo Horizonte's Urban Planning - the economist Marcello Faulhaber - who was already involved in the request for the execution of OUC, where is currently located Porto Maravilha in Rio de Janeiro.

## PLANO DE MODIFICAÇÃO DA CAPITAL

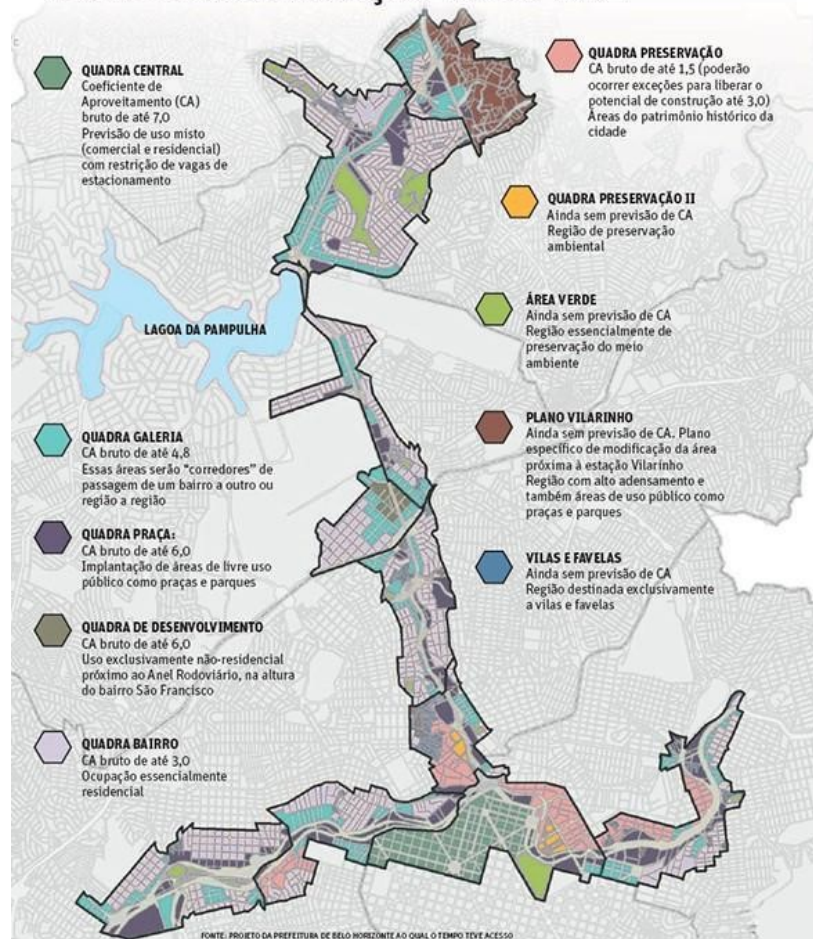


Fig. 2: Modification plan for the capital. Source: Project "Nova BH" - Belo Horizonte's City Hall. Source: Author's Collection.

The case regarding Belo Horizonte's central area is that the aesthetic and social range of the implemented projects along with the reality experienced by the region shows that - since the 90's - the existing historic heritage was not being treated as a form of resistance. Thus, the large urban projects started to serve this purpose, within the context of gentrification. During this process, the references to the revitalization of these spaces are commonplace, as well as the necessity to rescue the historical value of downtown - in order to attract new regulars and investments, due to the damage of the dynamics of occupancy and use.

Neil Smith (1987) verified that the abandonment and degradation of certain city areas, especially the central ones, create future opportunities for the real estate market. After the territory is transformed by new constructions and urban projects, the property increases its value, resulting in more money to the investors and the "expulsion" of former residents, tradesman, and visitors. In Belo Horizonte this process is visible.

Since 2007, with the Duel of MC's (a rap event), the conflict between the State's gentrifying efforts and the cultural network's resistance is even more apparent. The Duel of MC's is an event that relates to the hip-hop culture, that takes place under the Santa Tereza Viaduct. That was started by a group called Street Family (Família de Rua), with the intention of developing cultural events in the city's public spaces. Within the first editions, the organizers noticed the lack of infrastructure for this kind of activity, such as public lighting, energy outputs, public hygiene, trash cans and public restrooms, said Berquó (2015).

In 2009, a new obstacle emerged along with the prohibition of holding any event in the Station Square. According to Trevisan (2012), this Decree is a result of the disparity between the intended use by the society and the administrative intents of Arts & Crafts Museum. As soon as the Square was restored, it began to house large events. Some conflicts started to emerge between the events and the museum's administration - that had part of the building facing the Square.

As a response to the prohibition imposed by the City Hall, in January 2010, the first Praia da Estação (Station Beach) took place - a cultural movement that intends to discuss public spaces. In May of that same year, the mayor revoked the prohibitive Decree, introducing new regulations for the use of the Square, which did not please the event's crowd because it created too many requirements and prohibitions for the utilization of the space.

Since then, several activities and events related to the discussion of public space have taken place in that area, as shown by Berquó (2015): Sarau Vira-Lata (Pooch Party), Marcha das Vadias (Slutwalk), Samba da Meia Noite (Midnight Samba), Lavação, Cidade Eletronika (Electronic City) and many others. This diversity of cultural insurgency can be seen in the "Wheel of Conversation" held on 6th of November 2014, in the Station Square. A popular process that happened with a large intensity during the "June Journey" in Belo Horizonte in 2013, along with street movements and occupancies (Victor, et al., 2016).

Around December 2012, the building that housed the Miguelin project was closed for the setup of the Youth Reference Center (CRJ). The closing caused great indignation on the groups linked to the campaign for the rights of marginalized, homeless youth, mainly due to the absence of dialogue during a moment of such drastic change of politics designated for this group.

### **From the Corridor to the Cultural Zone: conflicts around the meaning of "culture"**

Simultaneously to the announcement of CRJ, Belo Horizonte's City Hall announced the foundation of the Station Square's Cultural Corridor, that would use resources from the newly released PAC (Development Acceleration Program) directed to the Historical Cities to promote new refurbishments of existing infrastructure. An architecture office was hired to elaborate the project.

At the beginning of the year 2013, the local foundation (FMC) organized two different moments dedicated to present the project to the society. It was evident the dissatisfaction about what was presented to the audience, especially due to the lack of social participation during the elaboration of the project – along with the eminent risk of gentrification.

On the first meeting, one of the people present said that "The cultural corridor already exists, it is real, and the duty of the public power is to make it more possible, incorporating everything that composes the life of this space – which includes cultural agents, homeless population and the city's proletariat" (Ayer, 2013, s.p.). On the second meeting, facing the deficiencies of the project requested by the FMC, the active social movements organized themselves to demand from the City Hall the creation of a Monitoring Committee, which was created on April 15th, 2013. Its function was to articulate the requests from the social movements to reformulate the project – which was to be done by the hired architecture office (Berquó, 2015). After two months' work, it was clear that even if new demands were added, the project wouldn't meet the already existent demands.

Against the implementation of the Cultural Corridor, social movements started affirming: "The Cultural Corridor already exists!". With this slogan, students of the Indisciplinar group and the seminar "UNI 009 Critical Cartography" at the Architecture and Urbanism School of UFMG – taught by Mrs. Natacha Rena, along with the social movement and other activists started to organize acts to demonstrate that cultural life already existed there.

In mid-2013, the official map for the "The Cultural Corridor already exists" was created by students inside Google Maps, with the purpose of mapping the various social movements, mostly informal ones, already composing the local cultural scenery (Berquó, 2015). It was also organized under the Santa Tereza Viaduct a festive occupancy called "A Ocupação" (Occupy), shedding light onto the movement's actors and manifesting the dissatisfaction related to the project presented by the City Hall. All of this was intersected by the protests that happened in June 2013 in several Brazilian cities.



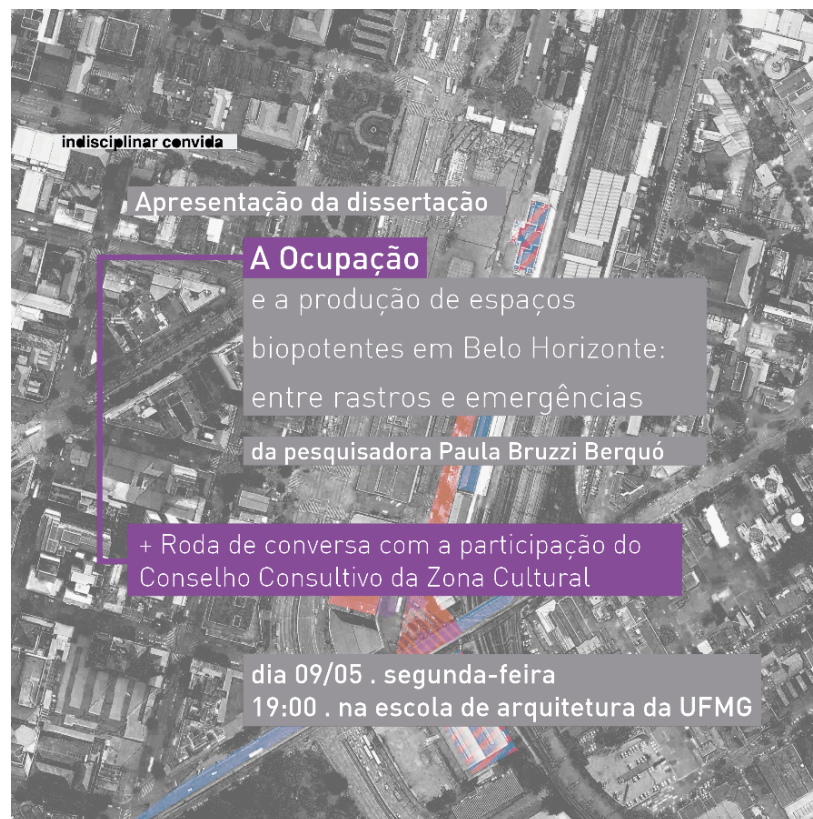
The Cultural Corridor's reformulation called "Cultural Zone" and the creation of the Consultative Council were used as topics during the public reunion organized by the FMC in 2004, in which also would be elected three society's representatives. However, the present representatives of social movements decided that the project did not meet the demands that were on the Monitoring Committee's report and concluded for the non-election of the Council.

In April 2015, the project was resumed through a new public meeting to elect the consultative council, formed by members of the Society and the City Government. The number of members in the council increased from six to ten and the deadline for the production of the master plan was extended in more than one year. During the year of 2015, the rules for the functioning of the Council were defined, and the goals were delimited. Considering the difficulties of creating a participative master plan without the necessary resources, it has been concluded that the master plan could not be done by a Consultative Council. Therefore the counselors agreed that the Council could elaborate guidelines for a future master plan, to be written by a larger society participation. As an ethical premise, the Council adopted a phrase used by one of the counselors: "Improving without expelling", as a principle against gentrification.

From September 2015 on, the Council's meetings dealt with the Cultural Zone's territory. Studies were presented by the City Hall's members and by Indisciplinar group about empty spaces and underutilized properties, existent historical and cultural equipment, and the urban parameters of the new master plan, processed at the City Hall. Besides, there were some discussions about the area's infrastructure, such as the lack of public restrooms and road closure for public events – which are regularly brought up by the visitors. These issues need to be urgently solved, although the City Government insists on ignoring them.

In 2016, the work within listing the date for the guidelines reformulation intensified. The Indisciplinar group, by means of two counselors that are also researchers in the group – Felipe Soares e Marília Pimenta – presented a methodology proposal based on mapping actors, cultural actions, relevant legislations and projects to the Cultural Zone. The counselors Laura Rennó and Izabel Dias – from the Municipal Secretary associated with Urban Planning – also presented a methodology proposal. It suggested giving voice to the existing social diversity inside the territory, based on methodologies related to the daily use of space. Cumulating both proposals, the council initiated their task in 2016 focusing on methods and tactics able to rescue the historical meaning of the territory, encouraging popular participation in the guideline's production, with the declared intent of avoiding the area's gentrification with the Cultural Zone's project.

Among the activities, it is worthy to highlight the EmBreveAqui (EBA) (SoonHere) presentation about the empty properties: the presentation of Paula Berquó's dissertation (2015) resuming the history of the popular occupancy. The thematic meetings about the situation of the homeless population and street sellers had the attendance of members of the City Government and the society. The "Walking Mutirão" was also present, which was the walk performed by the counselors searching to know more about the Cultural Zone and its surrounding streets. Furthermore, a workshop took place with various municipal counselors about Public-Private Partnerships, targeting to inform the society about the risks of this model of urban management and the privatization of public possessions.



**Fig. 4:** Web invitation for the Paula Berquó's M.A essay (2015), along with the Cultural Zone's Consultative Council. Source: Produced by the author – Marília Pimenta Chaves. Author's Collection.



**Fig. 5:** Counselors on the first "Walking Mutirão". Source: Author's Collection.



**Fig. 6:** Picture taken by the counselors Felipe Soares, during the second "Walking Mutirão". Source: Author's Collection.

The presence of Indisciplinar, as an academic research group with an open activist opinion, allowed the activity of knowledge producing to be as innovative as possible and with a positive result. It was clear that such techno-political method, when occupying the network and the streets, could be strategical for the effective occupancy of institutional spaces of the state.

By the end of the activities, some guidelines were created for the Cultural Zone, which could be highlighted by the necessity of a regulation regarding the street sellers – which are essential during cultural manifestations within the public space; the elaboration of public policies and space production for the homeless population; the construction and maintenance of public restrooms; the recognition of cultural diversity, including the most diverse forms of artistic expression like pixo and graffiti; legal and physical facilitation for cultural activities that are already taking place; legal regulation for empty public and private spaces that do not fulfill a particular social role; the importance of social housing within that region; the increase of social participation in the Council's activities; and the assurance of the power of decision-making along with the Council. Moreover, the Council made some remarks about spaces located in the Cultural Zone that deserve attention from the City Authorities and the society: the existence of several empty spaces and properties, especially private parking lots; the invasion of public property by entities like TJ-MG, PM-MG and the DER-MG; an impact on the construction of TRT-MG – that can quickly accelerate the gentrification process in that area due to the arrival of a new audience.



**Fig. 7:** Main page of Consultative Council's website. Source: Cultural Zone's blog screenshot. Author's Collection.







**Fig. 11:** photograph from the public meeting – public reading of guidelines along the counselors. Source: Author's Collection.



**Fig. 12:** A photograph from the public meeting – map used for the public analysis of Cultural Zone's perimeter. Source: Author's Collection.



**Fig. 13:** A photograph from the public meeting along with the researcher and the Council's president Felipe Soares. Source: Author's Collection.



**Fig. 14:** A photograph from the public meeting along with the researcher and counselor Marília Pimenta, introducing the guidelines on the Council's meeting. Source: Author's Collection.

It is not an easy task for a Municipal Consultative Council to propose guidelines for avoiding a gentrification process, which has been happening for years. It means to place oneself against the real state capital that purchased empty properties waiting for it to be valuable again, being aware of non-governmental organizations, social, cultural movements and the cultural industry as a whole. It is a priority to assure basic human needs for marginalized populations, like street sellers and the homeless population, which are severely harmed by gentrification projects. All must be done without falling for the fantasy of maintaining an untouched territory, considering that there are dynamic social spaces and the changes are already happening.

A significant amount of interests and flows that are part of this area requires the creation of new methodological alternatives capable of understanding the local implications and the whole global schedule. An example is a revitalization of urban centers

by sumptuous urban projects, instead of finding local alternatives along with the urban activist network and the social movements, which are the groups mainly affected by this type of project.

Therefore, the method used and the participation of Indisciplinar group was fundamental. Understanding the project's daily implications and impact of the cultural projects, was only possible due to the joint action of social movements, the society, the university and City Hall's technicians. The Cultural Corridor's project was seductive, but it was "hiding" the way it was going to be produced and the consequences involving an excluding urbanism. After the measures taken by the network of territorial activists, against the project, they succeeded in preventing the construction of the project. The next step was to occupy the council and find matters and present the process' blind-spots, with the goal of qualifying society's participation in the plan's design.

To put up against the gentrification process requires physical presence in the territory, as well as participation in the public bodies responsible for space planning. That is why the involvement of groups linked to social and cultural movements on the Cultural Zone's Consultative Council was crucial to prevent the consolidation of the Cultural Corridor's project, as planned by the State. Opening space for the construction of guidelines that enable the creation of a more democratic project, more open and connected to the local context.

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